

CHAPTER VIII.
(Continued.)

to the others: "There! What I tell y'! I knowed he wouldn't be asleep." The hoarse voice, thickened by a good deal by the celebration, boomed across the face of the cliff, bounded against the water again, and the Solomon struck town t'-night. He'll be down in th' mornin'."

"Let 'im come."

"Stick out fer th' five thousan'."

The Pearlhunter did not answer.

"Be up t'-morrow, sometime," the voice boomed out again.

"Come ahead."

The Boss tossed back no further word. A hot argument of some sort had started in the boat, though such a jumble of voices told him that it was a quarrel. He could not clearly see what it was about.

So Louie Solomon, the smoothest, trickiest, shiftest of them all, would be "down in the mornin'." The eyes of the Pearlhunter narrowed. For some time he sat looking down at the dark streak where the river lay, where the wrangling voices were finally swallowed up, and the creak of the oars came back fainter and fainter.

His jaws snapped together. He

turned and re-entered the cabin; the dishes were still awaiting him. A glimmer and a backward jerk of his hand was all the attention they got. The candle had burned low. The draft that set in from the open door had guttered it deep. He blew it out, flung off his clothes and rolled into bed.

"Five thousand!" he muttered, dropping into the sleep that comes easy to the woodman. "Not even Louie Solomon can beat me if I stick right there. That's what I'll do—stick—right there. I'm not askin' more, and he shan't have it foretold."

So lone as the pulse of the woods

beat normal the sleep of the Pearl-hunter was sound. The hoot of the owl; the wailing of the wildest; the howl of five wolves, never disturbed him. In cabin or houseboat, or out under the trees, he could sleep through it all. But let a false note creep into the wild melody and it instantly reached him. It was his training, and could be counted on.

Sometimes away in the dark woods the false note came—guarded foot-falls outside the cabin and close to the wall. Without start or stir the Pearl-hunter's eyes came open, every sense at keenest pitch. It must have been near morning, for the moon

stood almost straight in the open door. He slid his hand down his side, felt for the revolver under the edge of his thigh, laid it across his chest and covered both hand and revolver with his other arm. A form floated the moonlight upon the floor with a living smother of shadow. An arm came in at the door; a hand fumbled behind the casement. That was all. No face appeared. A moment or two, and the arm disappeared; the smother of shadow slid off the square of moonlight; the soft footfalls slipped away around the east end of the cabin and muffled into silence.

A man was picking his way up the bluff. He seemed in no great hurry, nor in the least disturbed. At the top of the bluff he stopped and looked back. In his brief instant of pause before striding away into the woods the moon picked him out clear as day. It was the Man-in-the-Fancy-Vest!

There was no more sleep for the Pearlhunter. He left the window, went to the cabin door and felt behind the casement where the hand

had groped. His fingers came in contact with a tiny bundle wedged between the logs and the door frame. He drew it forth and unrolled it in the moonlight, deeming it imprudent to light the candle. Even before the moonbeams fell upon it, he knew by a certain disgusting palponement what it would prove to be—a red mask.

He felt along the wall to the chink above the table and poked his fingers between it and the logs, where he had concealed the packet the evening they moved into the cabin. It was still there. He drew forth and compared it with the other. They were

He sat down by the table and dropped his chin in his palm. What did it mean? What must it mean? This last one? He knew the meaning of the first—dropped by chance as he had a very plausible surmise as to the story of the other, the one with the knife thrust through it at the three-gabled cabin. But this one—this last one.

He raised his eyes to the open door. Why had the arm slipped in across the moonlight and felt out with such care a hiding-place behind

He looked like a Red Mask, cheap at that price—the frock coat and vest, the shiny, steel-gray hair, the thin, straight, black, steely arm. But not that kind of Red Mask. The man was not that kind. The Washish country knew pretty well what the Red Mask was and what he was not. There was a dash of the dramatic in him, of the spectacular, a voluptuous taste for the picturesque; but—well, a man that could hold the law at the point of a dagger, a man that had time had other stuff in him than that.

No, he wanted to hide that bit of dark right there. But why? The Pearlhunter raked his brain for the answer. Why? He must have been

ignorant that the other was hidden behind the chink, or why should he have taken such pains to hide this one? He was probably ignorant of the fact that he had dropped the other one in the cabin that night; possibly did not know where he had lost it, or even that it was there. It is probable that the loss of it may have provoked him to a small anxiety. If he did not know that he had "dropped the other one" in the cabin, he probably was unaware that the Pearl Hunter knew him. The young man met still a long time over that thought.

That he could with such apparent readiness supply himself with another

chase after the first was lost suggested a nearby rendezvous, undoubtedly somewhere in the Flatwoods—a rendezvous of a confederate. But that was unlike him—to have a confederate. He was known to work alone. And his horse—he would not likely allow himself to get far from it. He wouldn't dare ride it into the village. Rockett, the famous thoroughbred of the Red Bank, was well known. And a horse cannot be easily disguised.

100

voice calling "Frost! telegram
pulling on a kimono and shoving
feet into slippers. I hurried to
door.

(To Be Continued Tomorrow.)

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